

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Social isolation and loneliness in people aged 55 and over in the UK

Conference or Workshop Item

How to cite:

Minocha, Shailey; Holland, Caroline; McNulty, Catherine; Banks, Duncan and Palmer, Jane (2016). Social isolation and loneliness in people aged 55 and over in the UK. In: Campaign to End Loneliness Research Hub Meeting, 14 Apr 2016, London School of Economics, 9th Floor Research Suite, Houghton Street, London, WC2A 2AE.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2016 The Open University, UK




<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk



Social isolation and loneliness in people aged 55 and over in the UK

Shailey Minocha, Caroline Holland, Catherine McNulty and Duncan Banks,
The Open University, UK

Jane Palmer, CEO, Age UK Milton Keynes

14th April 2016

14/04/16

1

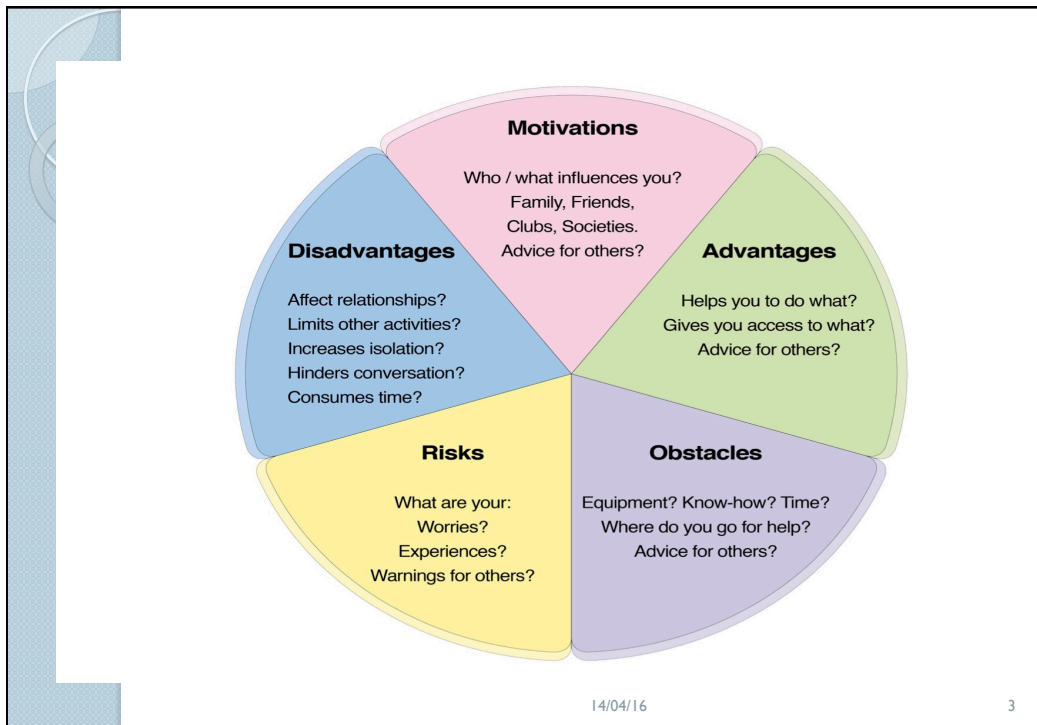


Research themes related to older people

- online social interactions
- social isolation and loneliness
- digital skills in people aged over 55 years
- digital health wearables
- conducting research with older people

14/04/16

2







Social isolation and loneliness – *in Milton Keynes*

Effects of social isolation on individuals

- individuals lacking social contact carry a health risk equivalent to smoking up to 15 cigarettes in a day
- social isolation is more harmful than not exercising and twice as harmful as obesity
- social isolation puts older adults at greater risk of early mortality, dementia, suicide and cognitive decline
- individuals are at greater risk of developing low self-esteem, depression and loneliness

14/04/16

9

Societal impacts of social isolation

- increased use of health and social care services, higher number of emergency admissions and GP consultations, slower discharge from hospitals
- pressure on financial resources and health services
- deprives communities from their knowledge and experience, and the roles that they could play in communities and neighbourhoods
- 'healthy' older people are more likely to be volunteers and to provide informal care - this increases social connectedness and alleviates pressure on the health services

14/04/16

10

Risk factors for social isolation

- low income
- unemployment, redundancy, retirement
- not having digital skills
- families being globally distributed
- being widowed or divorced
- being in a caring role
- losing the ability to drive
- language barriers
- insufficient access to resources (information, transport)

14/04/16

11

Risk factors in Milton Keynes

- rapidly ageing population
- diverse and growing population of BAME groups
- pace of development in MK
- crucial ongoing transport issues
- neighbourhood changes - commuter town, short-term occupancy
- built environment - centre, housing estates, satellite villages

14/04/16

12

Challenges for the community

- identifying older people who may be vulnerable
- communicating information about local support and initiatives
- diverse age range, needs and preferences – from 55 years to 90+
- paying attention to events in the lives of older people in communities without ‘intruding’
- constant change in the funding regime – effects on local libraries, transport, continuity of the initiatives

14/04/16

13

Challenges for older people

- preparing for one’s future – by building and nurturing a ‘personal convoy’
- being willing to be helped by others
- being open to new connections and friendships
- being open to new services and interests – e.g. getting online
- awareness of local initiatives and support groups

14/04/16

14

Possible solutions

- One-to-one interventions
 - visits by community home visitors
 - regular phone conversations
 - visits by neighbours – e.g. Casserole Club
- Group interventions
 - e.g. Men in sheds, lunch clubs, coffee mornings
 - inter-generational initiatives – e.g. learning to be online
 - e.g. walking groups, local history society
- Wider community and neighbourhood interventions
 - encouraging older people to be volunteers
 - co-design the programmes with older people - e.g. neighbourhood watch programmes
 - age-friendly design of spaces – local neighbourhoods, city centre

14/04/16

15

Individuals and communities

- changing attitudes to older age
- paying attention to events in the lives of older people
- recognising loneliness
- developing volunteering capacity within communities
- recognising that families play a key role
- setting up local initiatives and especially those that involve different generations
- variety of services for different age groups and life stages
- being gender-aware
- focussing on the quality rather than the quantity

14/04/16

16

Digital inclusion – *online social interactions*

14/04/16

17

Digital inclusion

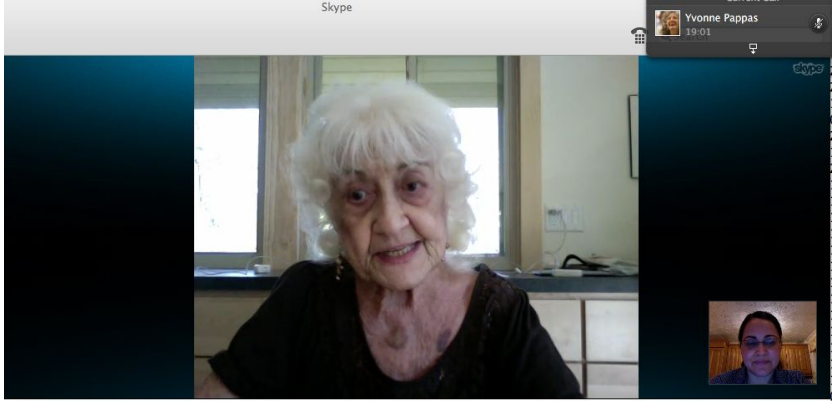
- can lead to greater social inclusion
- to maintain and renew relationships
- regular interactions with the family

My mum was a bit of a campaigner and she belonged to an NHS [National Health Service] patient forum and they had meetings and they shared a lot of stuff by email ... and when she could no longer get to meetings she could still make a valid input on documents and stuff.

Decreased mobility may lead to older people becoming isolated. Online communities may help. I think a lot of deaf people, particularly people who lose their hearing in older age can become very, very isolated, so it [online interaction] is important.

14/04/16

18



Oh my God. I have always been like a sponge, trying to learn certain things. Now I need a whole big sponge, because I want to get through to all of these I can possibly get to learn about.

It has been a great change as far as age goes. I really don't have anything to worry about. If it is a rainy day or snow, I know I can go and continue to learn. Let's do it. That is what it has done to my mind. It has opened me even more.

14/04/16 19



14/04/16 20

Not mentally old or retired

Now if there were a theatre group in Fort Worth which is where I live, I would have to figure out how to get down town. Furthermore I'd have to make arrangements, leave 45 minutes early and of course it would take me 30 minutes to get back. So I would be spending all evening, if that were the time of the meeting, either getting there or getting back or in the meeting.

*It takes me 30 seconds at most to get there, more likely 10 seconds.
[Experiences of an older person in a 3D virtual world, Second Life]*

14/04/16

21

Concerns about being digitally connected

- can become an addiction – e.g. games, Facebook
- effect on physical mobility
- not participating in face-to-face interactions
- family not visiting them often
- fear of social isolation
- concerns about spam, trolling, cyber-bullying

I don't have any concerns about being online unless advertising becomes more intrusive and knows me better than I do.

14/04/16

22

need an incentive to get and stay online

A daughter said about her father: *“He tends to look up military bands [on YouTube] which is an interest that he has that he can’t access physically.”*

14/04/16

23

one-off training on using the computer and internet does not suffice

14/04/16


24



**need access to an ongoing
local technical support**

14/04/16

25



**prefer learning from one
another by sharing
knowledge and swapping
tips**

14/04/16

26

I have a Facebook account which I use to keep in touch with one of my daughters who travels quite a bit...

...but I'm not impressed with it, I find such a lot of Facebook content is shallow and inane.

The "pack instinct" that seems to come to the fore when people are bullied or trolled is so distasteful.

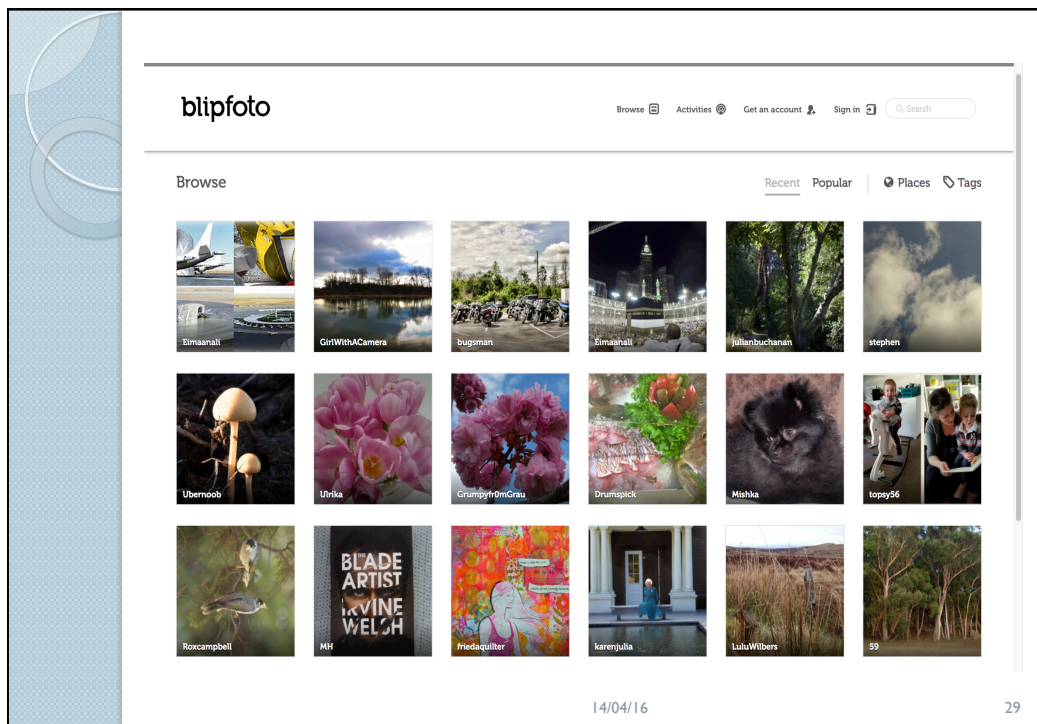
14/04/16

27

Blipfoto - *Networking through
photographs worldwide
blipfoto.com*

14/04/16

28



I wanted to keep my brain active and I also like taking photographs.

Also it opens my eyes to my surroundings and it gives me structure in my day

I find I am able to share some of my concerns and worries as well as extreme joys in a way which I am unable to do face to face with people.

It makes me go out every day to find something beautiful if possible.

It is wonderful when friends start doing it too and we then have a daily interaction that would otherwise be a once a year Christmas card!

14/04/16

31

Resources

- Minocha, Shailey; Holland, Caroline; McNulty, Catherine; Banks, Duncan and Palmer, Jane (2015). Social isolation and loneliness in people aged 55 and over in Milton Keynes. The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/43925/>
- Minocha, Shailey; McNulty, Catherine and Evans, Shirley (2015). Imparting digital skills to people aged 55 years and over in the UK. The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/44009/>

14/04/16

32

Contact details

- Shailey Minocha

shailey.minocha@open.ac.uk

profile: <https://uk.linkedin.com/in/shaileyminocha>

website: <http://www.shaileyminocha.info>